

16 · HISTORY

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• (212) ble, and these men maintained Bornu at an apogee of greatness until well into the seventeenth century. One of these rulers, Idris Alooma, had a court scribe at the beginning of the seventeenth century, who wrote a number of accounts of his royal master's military expeditions. Luckily these have survived to give us a picture of Bornu warfare and government in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. It was during this period, too, that Bornu was first mentioned on European maps, and from this time forward its fame became part of the legends of unknown kingdoms that lay inside the unexplored interior of Africa.

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648 Bornu traditions claim that the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries witnessed a decline in the power of the state. This is explained by the claim that the monarchy was becoming weak and overburdened with pomp, rituals, and religious study by the monarch. The ruling Mai appeared in public in a *fanadir*, or cage, which only his most trusted servants could approach and rarely led military expeditions himself. Much of this may be a reinterpretation of Bornu history by the second dynasty and their followers, who would naturally have played up the failures of the previous regime, when they took over in the nineteenth century. Contrarily there are traditions of many successful military campaigns during this period and Bornu's reputation as a great kingdom was still very widespread. Thus a wandering Englishman, Richard Tulley, who visited Tripoli at the end of the eighteenth century, spoke glowingly of what he had heard of Bornu's power. Parenthetically, he claimed that one of the Kanuri noblewomen living in Tripoli could speak the Italian language fluently.⁶ On the other side of the case, Tuareg and Tubu raiders attacked the northern boundaries of Bornu and harassed the caravans with greater intensity than before.

The activities of these raiders are said to have increased during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but it is important to realize that the entire southern Sahara was a hotbed of unrest during this two hundred year period. In the 1590s the armies of El Mansur of Morocco finally managed to cross the Sahara and destroy the great empire of Songhai. Its cities of Timbuctu and Gau never again became the great emporia of trade, politics, and learning they had once been. The Moroccans could not establish, so far from home, any stable administrative organization capable of replacing the one they had destroyed. This suddenly released vassal groups in the Sahara, many of whom bordered on Bornu, and these were now free to raid, stimulate revolts, and pillage caravans, while their cousins to the west fought over the remains of the Songhai empire and the control of western trade routes across the Sahara. It was during this same period of unrest that, all across the Sudan, wandering holy men, especially nomadic Fulani of Futa Djallon in Guinea, in Masina in the Upper Niger, and even in present day Nigeria, were expressing this disorder in religious terms. They preached through their leaders for a return to a truer and purer form of Islam: Often they claimed that those round them were pagans and had to be subdued in a holy war to reestablish Muslim order and law. It is in the light of all this turbulence that the so-called decline of Bornu in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries should be seen. Elsewhere empires were tottered or being formed, as in Futa Djallon; but Bornu remained, shaken perhaps by the general unrest of the period but still it survived, controlled its trade routes,

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[113] ⁶ R. Tulley, *Letters Written During a Ten Years' Residence at the Court of Tripoli*, Vol. II, (London: 1819), p. 51.

[GEIDAM]

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* [624] speakers of these languages as of English. It has been noted that both Shuwa and Fulani pastoralists are found in considerable numbers in Borno Province. The members of the group of NA Malams seem to be outstanding in their knowledge of other languages. Not only do they all speak Hausa and English, but three in addition speak Shuwa Arabic, two speak Fulani, and one speaks Mandara.

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• 212 Turning to reading ability (Table XVII), it can be seen that 15 of the sample (34 per cent) are able to read in English script, while 24 of the sample (54.5 per cent) are capable of reading in Arabic script. Writing the Kanuri language in Arabic script preceded the entry of the British into the area by several centuries; the British introduced writing in Latin (English) script and have taught this form of writing in the schools. It is clear that many more individuals are capable of writing in Arabic script today than in English script. It is also apparent that almost half of the sample are illiterate in any script.

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* [634] Of those who can write well in English script, 10 of the 11 fall into two groups: the Aristocracy and the NA Malams. Most of the individuals in the six other groups are unable to write in English script. The pattern of those who are capable of writing in Arabic script is quite different. Once again the NA Malams are an outstanding group. Not only can they all write in English script, but all can also write in Arabic script. Of course the Koranic Malams can also all write in Arabic script.

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Table XVII

2. Ability to Read in either English or in Arabic script

	English script			Arabic script		
	yes	little	no	yes	little	no
*177 • 212 *565 554 463 Aristocracy	4	1	-	1	3	1
Koranic Malams	1	-	2	3	-	-
Canteen operators	-	-	6	2	1	3
NA Malams	6	-	-	5	1	-
Kabuna	-	2	4	1	1	4
Craftsmen	-	-	6	-	1	5
Talaka	-	1	7	1	3	4
Low-status Individuals	-	-	4	-	1	3
Totals:	11	4	29	13	11	20

[GEIDAN]

*177 But in every one of the eight groups there is at least one
 • 212 individual who can write a little in Arabic script. Most of
 *463 the Kabuna, Craftsmen, and Low-status individuals can neither
 *534 write in Arabic script nor in English script. However, several
 *565 of the Talaka can write a little at least in Arabic script.

*177 The two types of script divide the two educational systems
 871 which operate side by side among the Kanuri. English script
 212 is taught in the schools; Arabic script is taught by the Malams.
 565 Those who have had some extended contact with the Western
 634 schools (the NA Malams and the Aristocracy) can write in Eng-
 lish script. Those who have studied with a Malam can write
 in Arabic script. Individuals who fall in this latter cate-
 gory are found in all of the eight groups, and several are
 among the Talaka. It is noteworthy that the NA Malams, who
 all write in English script, can also write in Arabic script.

*177 Table XVIII presents data on the possession of Western
 405 material goods. The first column compares those who own, or
 *565 have owned a wrist watch. All six NA Malams and 4 of the Aris-
 *634 tocrats owned a wrist watch at the time that they were asked.

Though a number of individuals in the lower class groups, par-
 ticularly in the Talaka group, have at one time owned a wrist
 watch, none owns one at present. This of course reflects the
 wealth differences among the groups. An individual Talaka may
 own a wrist watch for a short time, until he finds that he
 needs cash and sells it to some one else. Members of the NA
 Malam group and the Aristocracy are sufficiently wealthy to

[TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 258]

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in the Mediterranean, ensconced in Zinder (a tributary of Bornu) as the representative of the Bornu monarch. A slave raid carried on into Bornu territory by the monarch of this petty state, for the purpose of allowing him to pay some of his personal debts, was condoned by the Bornu "consul" because a portion of the spoils from the raid was to be sent to the Shehu. Richardson also expressed the opinion that much of the real power in Zinder was in the hands of the Shehu's Representative rather than with the local authorities. (1)

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From the earliest records extant of the Kanuri empire in Kanem right up until the arrival of the British, a system of tax exemption obtained called the Mahram. Although it most often applied to religious mullams, who were recognized in this way for their esoteric knowledge in matters of law and religion, special services to the king were sometimes rewarded in the same way. These exemptions were always recorded in writing, so that when the British arrived and began instituting their own form of universal taxation many of these documents, some claiming 990 years of exemption, turned up. They were collected, translated and subsequently published by Palmer. (2)

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Judicial power was divided between the political leaders and the Muslim Alkalai (judges), as it is today. In the kingdom of the Mais centered at Birni Gazargamo, traditions tell of the Mainin Kanendi, literally the second to the king. This man was the chief judge of the state and, it is said, the second most important man in the realm.

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In the house and the quarter of the Mainin Kanendi were twelve other judges, who with himself constituted the high court of the realm. In the larger towns, the king appointed local mullams to act as judges, from

- (1) Richardson, J. Mission to Central Africa; Vol. II, pp. 182ff; 1853
- (2) Palmer, H.R. op. cit. pp. 12-51.

On the Friday within the eight-day

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851 period, or several
[824] days before this if the child is born on a Friday, two or three
kola nuts are sent to the males of the town who are friends and
relatives of the household, as well as to important persons of the
immediate area. This serves as an announcement of the birth of a
new member to the household, and as an invitation to the naming
ceremony which takes place on the eighth day after birth.

The Naming

553 On the morning of the eighth day after birth the formal
[562] naming ceremony (su) takes place. As to all public gatherings, men
[431] and women come and go separately. The women, bringing food and
[576] flour, arrive in single file, senior women in front of junior in
rank, and pass, eyes downcast, into the compound to the women's sec-
tion. The ground millet flour allows the young wife to cook for her
husband during the next few weeks without going through the arduous
[302] task of grinding millet. The women sit out in front of the hut of
the mother chatting gaily and colouring their teeth, while the mother
[304] remains in her hut. The barber arrives to cut the face marks and
remove the uvula of the child.

[793] In front of the compound the men sit on either side of
[212] the entrance hut. On the left side (as you come out of the compound)
a senior mallam, other mallams, and mallams-in-training, read the
entire Koran by passing out several pages to each of the literates
who have come for this purpose. On the right hand side of the en-
trance hut the men of the household sit on mats in order of senior-
ity, with close friends or high status persons waiting patiently
[43] for the reading to finish and the name to be announced. All males
usually contribute some money (two to five shillings varying up to
one pound for high status visitors) as a token of friendship. The

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555 in Bornu, itself, by Kanuri. It is recognised, especially in the
871 upper ranks of society and among the urban masses, that some western education is a prerequisite for successful advancement in political offices and in the civil service in general. Because the government educational system is not entirely controlled by the existing Kanuri office-holders it has proved to be a method of recruitment into high status positions that allows for a certain measure of social mobility.⁽¹⁾ One informant, the eldest son of a deceased District Head, is related to the royal family of Bornu. His fondest wish is to be appointed some day to the position of District Head which he feels is his birth-right. But he has no formal western education, knows very little Hausa, and therefore has very little chance of ever achieving this aspiration.

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571 With the expansion of all governmental services since the end of World War II, there has developed a large group of young civil servants, all of them western educated to some extent, and in varying degrees, who are referred to by the local British as "the mallams" or "the young mallams".⁽²⁾ They are the clerks, agricultural field assistants, teachers, sanitary inspectors, veterinary assistants, medical dispensers, etc. They read newspapers in Hausa and English,
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[212] own radios, wrist watches, socks, European made shoes, bicycles, and

871 (1) That there is still much control exerted is illustrated by the school-boy population in Maiduguri which was used for questionnaire purposes by the writer. Of the 168 boys in the secondary and the senior primary schools, 21 were of the Babur tribe; of the 21 Babur boys, only two were (by their own admission) in the secondary school, while 19 were in the senior primary. The Kanuri majority has less control over the students from the districts who are chosen to attend the central urban senior primary school than they do over who is to receive promotion from senior primary to secondary school. In such a discriminatory atmosphere, many non-Kanuri youngsters change their names to more Kanuri-sounding ones.

(2) cf. Leith-Ross, S., The Development of a Middle Class in the Federation of Nigeria. Paper delivered at the 29th Session of the International Institute of Differing Civilizations in London, September 1955.

442 camp stools, battery radios, talk of politics and city life enliven the
369 rural scene.

442 Malam Mina buys for his mai gida, Alhaji Ali, a Kanuri trad-
443 er in Maiduguri who has a retail store or "canteen" as it is called
452 locally. The mai gida gives Malam Mina cigarettes, flashlight batteries,
perfumes, etc., for the latter's teber (table) or booth which a younger
[405] brother runs for him in Maiduguri. Alhaji Ali obtains about ten scales
from a Levantine trader during the harvest season and gives them out to
his tada (boys) who go to the bush and buy the cash crop. Malam Mina
receives a straight commission of 12/- per ton of decorticated nuts and
as much profit as he can on the import items (mostly textiles) which
are also obtained on credit from his mai gida. He remarked how he had
only been with Alhaji Ali this one year, last year having bought for
another man who had a direct link to a European company. However, last
year he found that his buying price was £20.0.0 less per ton than other
[434] scale men, and his commission fell. In 1955 his commission (from re-
ceipt slips) was about £60.0.0 but he hoped to get around £75.0.0 or
£80.0.0 in 1956-57.

442 Malam Mina may, if it is possible, depress the price below
435 the buying price given to him. This causes no undue concern on the part
[455] of his mai gida in the city as long as his tonnage does not decline. He
also buys futures at 20/- to 25/- per bag, whenever he can, but would not
estimate how much of this he does.

441 It is interesting to note that Malam Mina has been taken on
571 by his new mai gida and given a trading role without the more usual per-
iod of general service and subordination, as in the case of the "boys"
• [212] of Alkali Bukar. Here we have another example of specialization. Malam
Mina is an experienced scale man. He can read and record figures and
sign his name.

THE SUCCESS THAT FAILED

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Linton (1952: 77) has also suggested that peasants view any attempts to change their economic condition with suspicion when these originate from their rulers. The peasant, often quite justifiably, feels that anything his rulers offer as a chance to improve conditions is probably much more to the ruler's advantage than to his own. 177 829

This was very certainly the case in Magumeri, and had occurred several times before. Thus, only a few weeks before the fertilizer demonstration began, the Village Head of Magumeri had tried to convince people of the worthiness of literacy. His argument centered around the idea that when literate the peasants would be able to catch their rulers, including himself, for issuing false tax receipts (Cohen and Frank, 1960). When the people refused to volunteer he forced a number of individuals to sign up for the literacy courses. It is difficult to say exactly how many were forced to "volunteer" for the fertilizer demonstration, but that coercion was involved is undoubtedly true. 212 • 177 829 [242]

On the other hand, a strange and almost unprecedented thing occurred at the final meeting when the people were asked whether or not they would use the fertilizer in the coming year. District Council meetings were usually very stiff affairs in which a formal agenda was followed under the guidance of a British District Officer. Very often a District Head rehearsed these "democratic" meetings first to make sure motions would be seconded, voted on properly, etc. On this occasion, an African District Officer was present, and the District Head gave the members of the Council a definite choice as to whether they would accept the fertilizer or not. Bornu is an autocratic country and subordinates are usually ordered about, unless the matter is a trivial one. The outward signs of democratic procedures introduced by colonial rule are very superficially imposed upon feudal autocracy, so that effective social action is carried out dictatorially. This is an ancient society and people are traditionally accustomed to these procedures. That dictatorial powers were not invoked over the decision to use, or not use, fertilizer in years to come, immediately defined it as a trivial and unimportant matter upon which people could make up their own minds. 242 177 634 642